

Speak Up!

Speak Out!

Be Heard!

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A Harvard Study shows that women are three times more likely to speak up in a meeting with no men in the room. **SHOCKING!!!!** As I travel around the country presenting to various groups, younger women have continually mentioned that they have trouble speaking up or being heard in mixed-gender meetings. When I checked with several of my fellow tenured (over 20 years in business) colleagues, they too were surprised by this complaint. I guess this is something we thought we had overcome early in our careers and that it was no longer an issue for women. Apparently, it is.

Here are some suggestions from previous generations and the things we learned.

Speak Up!

Your first responsibility is to SPEAK UP! Speaking up starts with a strong (in the lower range, usually deeper) voice. Sometimes you need to interrupt others, depending on the tempo of the group. Observe the behaviors of others in the group and try to follow that style. It will probably feel funny at first because it may be different than your natural style. Be brave and try different things. Here are a few suggestions.

- Raise your voice
- Lower the tone of your voice – one friend calls it her teacher voice, low and strong
- Whisper – *everybody wants in on a secret* - when there is a lull in the conversation, whisper loud enough to be heard
- Raise your hand – perhaps in a declarative way like **hold on!** Not as in “may I speak?”.
- Interrupt
- Use humor, when appropriate
- Call it like it is – “Gentlemen, I have a comment.....”

Speak Out!

I have a theory that women are more likely to speak out OR to do something about serious issues and less likely to do it for credit or notoriety. If you know of some research on this topic, I would love to read it.

After attending an event where several women expressed a need to better understand how to speak up in meetings, one senior woman at a financial services firm decided she would share this feedback with her male colleagues so

they could be supportive. She was concerned because she didn't want talented people with a point of view to go unheard.

As another example of speaking out, a female CEO of a suburban hospital was getting pressured to use certain contractors connected to the governor's campaign. She called the FBI and wore a wire to turn states evidence against the Governor of Illinois, leading to his incarceration.

Female contributions to changes in the course of history go back through the ages. Historians believe that if it were not for female spies, Washington may have lost the Revolutionary War! However, no one knows exactly who these women were, including Washington! This interesting account of these female spies is documented in a recent book titled *George Washington's Secret Six: The Spy Ring That Saved the American Revolution* by Brian Kilmeade and Don Yaeger. At the end of the book, the historians speculate on seven women they suspect as being the most likely to have been the sixth spy and changed history without taking any credit. Perhaps all seven women were involved!

Cynthia Cooper wrote a book about her experience, *Extraordinary Circumstances: The Journey of a Corporate Whistle Blower*. Ms. Cooper was the internal auditor and a Vice President at WorldCom and found very significant accounting irregularities. Refusing to remain silent about her suspicions, she uncovered \$3.8 billion in fraud. Ms. Cooper was named by Time Magazine as their 2002 Person of the Year. The proverbial feeling in the pit of her stomach served her well.

It is our responsibility to continue to push through the glass ceiling and the "buddy network" and speak out to support others to do so, as well.

Be Heard!

You may need to try several different techniques to be heard. Once you find what works for you and the group dynamic, you will be well on your way to being heard. Here are a few techniques to try:

Sound bites

While studies show women, in fact, do **NOT** talk more than men, the perception that they do so is common. If you shorten your comments, you will fight the unconscious bias that women often talk too much. Politicians very frequently speak in sound bites. A sound bite is a short, memorable comment that cuts to the chase by succinctly summing up your point. Sometimes, you can plan them before you find yourself in a meeting that requires clear, crisp statements to carry the issues discussed. Another effective approach is to create a reputation for using sound bites in the form of provocative questions. At one company, I was known for the question "Has anybody run the numbers on that?"

Provocative Questions

Questions that reframe, direct or make people think in a different way can all be provocative questions.

*Is this plan best for our clients?
Has anyone run the numbers on this plan to see what it costs?
Are the capital costs really the question or is cash flow more relevant?
Have we considered our competitors' potential responses?
What would you do if this were your company?*

Use an example or story

At times an example, metaphor or story can help communicate your input. Keep it short and memorable. If it paints a picture it is more likely to be easily repeated.

Follow up in writing

The pen is mightier than the sword. Putting things in writing can get peoples' attention. Doing so, shows you took the time to write it down and that you are serious about your suggestions. Writing also helps you to hone your message. One-page briefs with facts and figures are often the most convincing. It is a great way to follow up when you were not able to make your points in a meeting.

Do a fly by or drop in

Sometimes key points can be made after a meeting. You can stop by the meeting leader's office and add your two cents. Face-to-face, one-on-one can be very effective. Make is short and to the point and don't whine or complain, just offer your streak of brilliance. Doing so can show that you are thoughtful about issues and help to create new contacts.

Control the pen

If flip charts are being used or notes taken to document the discussion and decisions made, often meeting attendees don't want to be saddled with that "menial" task. I have found that if you control the pen in generating the record that you can add your thoughts as you compose the list or complete the notes.

Women in Pensions Network (WiPN) will be conducting a live event in Chicago hosted by Nuveen on August 25 to further discuss the experiences, successes and remaining work to be done in Speaking Up, Speaking Out, and Being Heard. Following the live event, we will conduct a webinar to report on our collective findings. We hope you can join us for either or both.